

Are You Putting Up Roadblocks to Effective Communication? Part 1

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*(This article is part 1 of a series of two articles on "**Roadblocks to Effective Communication.**")*

Many of my clients find it helpful to go through the following list with their close relationships in mind, to find out what behaviours they may be engaged in that are causing problems.

An interesting exercise is to see if you can find yourself in **at least a couple** of the different behaviours below. We've all done at least some of them, at one point or another.

You can then do the same--ideally in your head!--for a significant other. (Although if they're open to it, it can be useful to share this list with a loved one.)

Remember, the goal here is not to change someone else's behaviour. As much as we may wish this were different, when it comes down to it **the only thing we can change is ourselves.**

The first step is always awareness--**bringing something to consciousness will help you start to change it.** To help do this, you could:

- Keep a piece of paper handy and mark down how often in a week you engage in one of the behaviours.
- Ask for help from a significant other to help you identify when you are doing this (in a neutral way, of course!)
- With agreement from family members, put the list on the fridge so you have an ongoing reminder of what doesn't work.

More ideas to come in part 2, but for now here is the first half of the list:

Roadblocks to Effective Communication

1. **Assuming:** Saying or implying that you know the other person's thoughts. Doesn't give them any space to be different than what you think.
2. **Belligerence:** Speaking loudly, or yelling, and using aggression in your tone. Dominating the communication and not letting the other person's ideas influence you.
3. **Blaming:** To say that a problem is the other person's fault sets people against each other rather than putting them on the same team to solve a problem. The goal is to solve the problem, not place blame or fight over what has happened.
4. **Changing the subject:** Talking about something that is not related to the thing you started to talk about. Happens when we feel uncomfortable about the subject matter, or when we are not really listening.
5. **Criticism*:** Name calling, insulting the ideas and efforts of the other. Turning a person's

behaviour into a character flaw.

6. **Contempt***: Talking or acting as though you are better than/smarter than/kinder than, etc. the other person; talking with a sneer and a nasty or bitter tone. This is the number one predictor of divorce.

7. **Cutting off communication abruptly**: One person ends the conversation quickly by leaving or no longer talking. This communicates "if we can't do it my way, forget it." Few problems can be resolved when one or both people are unwilling to talk.

8. **Defensiveness***: An attempt to protect oneself that occurs when one person believes that he or she is being blamed or misunderstood. Sometimes involves counter-attacking or whining.

*The behaviours with a star beside them are three of the four behaviours that couples researcher John Gottman calls the "4 Horsemen." **Research shows that when these behaviours occur regularly in a relationship and are not recognized by the offender and apologized for after they happen, they become predictors of divorce or relationships ending.***

If you find that you are struggling with changing some of these behaviours on your own, consulting a counselling professional can be very helpful.